

“...in respect to a festival...things which are a mere shadow,
of what is to come, but the substance
belongs to Christ (Col. 2:16-17).”

We are in a series on the great feasts of Ancient Israel, and we are doing so with some basic insights and assumptions.

1. The Bible has one central theme that undergirds the ultimate purpose for all of God's actions (the glorification of the Triune God). The secondary, cardinal theme is found in the word, “redemption” the “restoration of all things” through the accomplishments of Christ and the application of that work by the Holy Spirit.
2. The unfolding of that secondary theme, the means for the accomplishment of the primary theme, stretches across the pages of the Bible, from the creation to the fall, the process of re-creation, and the final restoration.
3. The progressive disclosure of the restoration of all things is revealed in two volumes of the Book, the Old Testament using the lens of the ancient people of God and the New Testament advancing the progress of restoration through the Church, the new people of God, composed for some time largely of Gentiles (while the opposite was true in the previous era).
4. The Old Testament reveals the story of redemption in a shadowed, anticipatory manner of forms (people, ceremonies, feasts, rituals) that only become clearer in meaning as one reads the New Testament, finally in Revelation 21-22.
5. Thus, in taking up Israel's feasts, we understand them as predictive of greater clarity that is to follow. All of Israel's feasts foreshadow the person and accomplishments of Jesus Christ in some manner, they are veiled revelations of the redemption that is through our Lord.

Parenthesis: A clarification

Last week we took up the first of Israel's great feast, the Passover, the celebration of Israel's deliverance from slavery which prefigures a greater redemption through the blood of the true, unblemished lamb of God (John 1:29). If Jesus is the true Passover Lamb, how could He eat the Passover Thursday evening with His disciples in Jerusalem, redefining it as a memorial to Himself, and be the Passover sacrifice at 3:00 Friday when the lamb was slain in the Temple? According to Mark, Jesus was placed on the cross at 9:00 AM (the third hour according to Roman time keeping), at the sixth hour (12:00 PM) the land became darkened, and at the ninth hour (3:00 PM) Jesus relinquished His life, at which time the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was rent from the top to the bottom (access into the presence of God having been procured in the “death of death,” the payment paid, the darkness turned to light literally and figuratively (15:33-38, also Luke 23:44).

If the Jews ate the Passover meal after the lamb was slain in the temple, how do you explain the disciples eating the meal on the night before? The answer is found in the time Galilean Jews celebrated Passover as opposed the Judean Jews. Both celebrated the Passover on Friday, but the beginning of the Jewish day began in the evening and ended the following twilight ("there was evening and there was morning one day" [Gen. 1:5]). *This is one reason Judeans thought of Galileans as less spiritual.* Thus, Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples and was the Passover on the same day!

Passover, First Fruits, and Unleavened Bread

These three feasts are in a sense are three-in-one encompassing a week-long celebration. Further, it marks the beginning of the new year (it marks a new beginning in spiritually as well). All three of these feasts look in some way to the greater deliverance in Christ.

Passover: Friday, 14th of Nisan (Deliverance through a Lamb)

Feast of Unleavened Bread, 15-21 of Nisan, Saturday to Saturday (separation from evil by the Lamb)

First Fruits: Sunday, 16th of Nisan (Victory of the Lamb)

I. The Passover

"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's Passover" (Lev. 23:5).

The Passover celebrates deliverance from death through the shedding of the blood of an unblemished lamb, the birth of the "Congregation of Israel" through miracle, the people of God. What was anticipated was fulfilled, the picture of deliverance became a reality when Christ became the sacrificial lamb. Christ reinterpreted the final Passover into a memorial celebration and even that would take place the following day and the creation of the "new people of God."

II. The Feast of First Fruits

"When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord.... On the *first day after the sabbath* the priest shall wave it (Lev. 23:10-11)."

- A. The symbol of celebration, the waving of sheaves, after they came into the land, was to be brought to the priests for waving before the Lord.
- B. Since was the fruit of barley sheaves was waved, it was connected to the agricultural cycle (first of the harvest).

- C. The Wave offering was to be celebrated with three other components: a burnt offering (an unblemished lamb), a meal offering of flour mixed with oil, and a drink offering. Lev. 23:12-13
- D. Eating was prohibited until after the presentation of the barley sheaves (Lev. 23:14a).
- E. "...it is a statute forever throughout your generations in your dwellings (Lev. 23:14b).
- F. This feast was celebrated until the exile. When the Jews were not in the land it could not be practiced (no priests, no sacrifices, no tabernacle, no temple). In the Christian era, Jews were forbidden to own land and engage in agriculture (they became "Master of Commerce:" banking, trade) so it was not observed.
- G. In Israel today it is observed in the Kibbutzim, socialized farms. Men go into the barley fields and cut sheaves; women bind them in bundles, and they are carried on carts decorated with fresh flowers; dancing takes place in the fields where the grain is cut. After lighting torches at nightfall, a process carries them to the dining hall where the sheaves are stacked as a special offering. The observance ends with an evening of singing.
- H. The meaning of the Feast of First Fruit is found in the New Testament, the anticipated fulfilled.
 - 1. The Lord ate the Passover meal, ending it forever by redefining it, with His disciples on Thursday evening (which was Friday by Jewish reckoning).
 - 2. Jesus, the true Passover Lamb, was crucified on Friday.
 - 3. He rose from the dead early Sunday morning, the true sabbath of the Christian faith.
 - 4. The deepest significance of First Fruits is found in I Cor. 15:21-23. The proof of the sacrifice of Christ is the resurrection.

"For us by a man came death, by a man has come also
The resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die,
so also, in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his
own order: *Christ the first fruits*, then at His coming
those that belong to Him."

Passover prefigures deliverance from death through death; First Fruits the triumph of the one who died as proof of our life, even through death! Passover speaks of our deliverance from death; First Fruits what we are delivered unto through His death. "Passover" took place in one day; "First Fruits" is the guarantee of our triumph through what was accomplished on that one day, through the resurrection!

III. The Feast of Unleavened Bread

"And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the
Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven day you shall eat
unleavened bread (Lev. 23: 6)."

- A. The feast celebrates the Exodus from the land of Egypt with great haste, not so must the miracles attendant to their leaving but the manner of their leaving. As Moses

described it subsequently, the celebration is defined as a “memorial...a permanent ordinance” (Exod. 12:14, 17; 13:10).

- B. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week-long celebration that commenced the day after the Passover, the fourteenth day of the month). This would mean it began on a Sabbath and ended on a sabbath.
- C. The feast is eight days in length, but the removal of leaven from homes takes place before the Passover celebration.
- D. On the first and last day of Unleavened Bread there was to what is described as a “holy convocation” (Lev. 23:8).
- E. On those two days there was to be not ordinary work, meaning the activities that were normal on other days (Exod. 12:16).
- F. During the eight days only unleavened bread (matzo) is to be eaten in Jewish homes (Exod. 12:7).
- G. One of the purposes of the feast is instructional. “You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’” (Exod. 12:8). It celebrates the day of the nation’s separation from bondage!
- H. How long the people ate unleavened bread in the wilderness we do not know. We do know that the carried unleavened bread in bowls as they left.

“So the people took their dough before it was leavened,
with their bowls bound up in clothes on their shoulders....
And they baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt
into cakes of unleavened bread (Exod. 12: 34, 39).”

- I. What does the Feast of Unleavened Bread anticipate and is fulfilled in the coming of Christ? All three feasts spoke to the issue of the believer’s salvation in Christ.
 - 1. Passover speaks of deliverance, the deliverance from bondage in a foreign land. It speaks of the procurement of salvation through the shedding of blood and the miracle of the rebirth.
 - 2. First Fruits speaks of the certainty of our deliverance through the resurrection of Christ from the death proving that through His death, death itself, the death of separation from God, has been conquered. The certainty of our salvation is evidenced in His resurrected life.
 - 3. Unleavened bread may also hint to the person of the deliverance who was not only an unblemished lamb in outward appearance, but inwardly was untainted by any corruptive influences. He was the sinless Son of God, who could deliver us from bondage. He alone was made sin for us!
 - 4. Like the other two feasts of commemoration, this one looks back; Israel’s great deliverance from bondage, separation from sin (leaven being a symbol of sin in this instance), the removal of leaven being symbolic of deliverance from bondage to “Egypt.”
 - 5. The feast represents our ongoing separation from sin; it reminds us that we are to daily put away the “old leaven” that clings to our frame.

It speaks of the daily walk of the believer are to lay aside our old “Egyptian selves” and daily strive to reflect what we are in Christ, now symbolized by the removal of leaven. The Feast of Leaven Bread speaks of our daily dying to the word by striving to remove “the leaven in our lives.” This is the biblical concept of progress sanctification. Because we have been delivered, we should act like it. “Egypt” is behind us, the “Promised Land” before us, not the earthly land across the Jordan River then, represents “the city whose builder and maker is God” that Abraham sought. The feast, our ongoing sanctification in Christ as His new creation.

“Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ is our Passover also has been sacrificed for us. Let us therefore celebrate the feast not with old leaven...but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (I Cor. 5:7-8).”

Conclusions:

1. God establishes memorials of His great redemptive grace toward us that, as we reflect on their deepest meaning, our faith would be strengthened. The Jewish people had the great feasts to remind them of grace in the past, grace today, and as a time of renewal. Our redemption has come in Jesus and the shadows have now been more fully explained. If these feasts remind us in symbol of our great redemption, they teach us that we must approach the worship of God with preparation, consecration, and sincerity. A debt paid for us becomes a debt of gratitude owed! Do we not have weekly “sabbaths,” as well as Christmas and Easter? Do we not have the Lord’s Table? Do we not look back as we think of them; Israel still looks forward in hope that the symbolized will become a reality someday.
2. We must learn that the worship of God requires time for preparation, consecration of mind and efforts, as well as sincerity of heart. In all relative to the feast there are ten specific qualifying instructions.
 - a. According to later rabbinic elaboration, the unleavened bread was to be prepared in no more than eighteen minutes or it was to be thrown away. It was called “the bread of haste” for two reasons; it was to be made in haste and eaten in haste.
 - b. All leavened bread was to be removed on or before the first day of the feast.
3. It is interesting that our text that the Feast of Unleavened Bread functions as a memorial or ordinance (Exod. 12:17); the former suggests its function, the latter that it is commanded. They are symbolic in that they conceptualize deep spiritual truths. They look forward as well as backward. In the New Testament we have two, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Both look back and forward as well. The Greek word that is for them is “mystery” from which through Latin Vulgate we get the word “sacrament.” We generally shy away from calling them sacraments because of the misconception of the word in Roman Catholic Theology. The ordinances or sacraments do bring grace to us, but it is strengthening grace, not saving grace.

Applications:

1. As we study the Jewish feasts, I continue to marvel at the panorama of the divine unfolding of wonder of redemption. It was across centuries that the Acts of God were disclosed, and its fullness still awaits our entrance into eternity.
 - a. It tells much about the character of the God (His care, His infinite wisdom, His great love for creatures, His power).
 - b. It tells us that there is no reason to think that God will ever change His mind and renege on his divine plan; human beings like us cannot alter His plans. We are limited by time; His is eternal. In Him and His great revealing of Himself to us is our security.
2. The feasts speak volumes to me about the importance of celebrating the great actions of God on our behalf. Clearly this reminds me of the importance of the Table of the Lord, a looking back in remembrance and a looking in anticipation of His return. While Christmas and Easter have been grotesquely secularized into “Santa’s” and “bunnies,” we must celebrate their profound significance. Those events changed the world forever! It is important to celebrate great events (birthdays, weddings, accomplishments). *I am not opposed to fantasy and mystery, fiction, because that is a part of all of us. We should never stop dreaming or fantasizing!*
3. The feasts of old depict our salvation in shadowed form that should always remind of what has become new. We have all been carried out of “Egypt,” the “land of bondage,” a life of servitude to the “unleavened bread” in our lives. We have been spared from death through the death of another. We have all the proof we need of this through the resurrection of the “First Fruits” of salvation, Jesus Christ. Now we are to “put off the old man,” the remnants of the “leaven” that remains in our lives by “putting on the new man.” Assurance of final victory awaits us because Jesus is the “First Fruits!!”

